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A Dissertation
on
The effects
of
Abstinence
in
The prevention
and
Cure of
Disease.

John D. Price

admitted March 10th 1824

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So many different Theories on the subject of Animal life have been maintained by men whose talents & opportunities entitle them to the greatest respect, that it may now with some confidence be conjectured that like Perpetual Motion it is a matter beyond the ken of mortal man fully to comprehend. Nevertheless a correct Theory on this subject might go very far towards facilitating our knowledge of the cure of the deranged state of its several functions: and so long as any remain, who scorn to tread the path of ignorance or error, merely becaus others have trodden it before them, it is to be hoped that this dark corner in science may yet receive illumination, to the praise of some genius of brighter mould: thro' the influences of Him alone who is the Author of life & Source of all Wisdom.

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It is not material to the investigation of the subject now attempted, that every particular respecting the method of our existence should be fully understood. Whether with Heraclitus & Parmenides & Hippo we believe that a fairy principle in the shape of an invisible fluid or exhalation - or of fire or of vapour animates the machine: Or whether with Pythagoras we think that a detachment from the great anima mundi, or with Plato that a plastic nature half soul & half body, or with Aristotle that a principle, which he calls the first entelechia of the natural organic body - having three faculties a nutritive, a sentient & a rational one — has the living powers under its direction: Whether with Epicurus we believe the principle of life & intelligence is only a modification of matter, or with the great Hippocrates & others we contend for a φυσις an anima - a πνευμα - a calliduum innatum - a ra-

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-tional soul - a vis insita vel nervea - or even for the Vis medicatrix natura of Dr. Cullen - still the same observation holds good - what-ever opinion we adopt viz. That there is a something in living matter which sepa-rates it in toto from all inanimate sub-stances, & this something requires constant solicitation to cause it to unfold its properties. Somewhat on the plan of the great Dr. Rush I shall consider life a solicited or coaxed state - for the continuance of which in an ac-tive & visible form - a constant supply of pro-per sustenance is demanded - agreeably to the various appetites implanted by our Creator, which duly & properly satisfied con-stitute health, & unduly or improperly at-tended to, sink into disease, which, I should rather consider a forced or unnatural state. With the ingenious Franklin, I certainly think these appetites in our present condition

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depraved & craving much more than necessary, requiring in youth the restraint of superiors & in adult age the steady rein of reason to keep them in due subjection. Nevertheless I cannot in any wise agree with those who consider nourishment the stimulus inducing Death. It is true some animals have lived we know not how long in impenetrable cavities destitute of all that we esteem essential to active life. & seeds we know may exist for an indefinite period - without developing their living germ. Yet for the purposes of active life, however depraved may be the instinctive appetite of an infant, thro the sin of its parent, most certainly the All-wise Creator, who does nothing in vain — would not have provided a breast to afford it milk — & all the varied apparatus for digestion & nourishment — had it not been intended that useful, visible life should be sus-

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tured in this manner. It therefore is the excess of stimulus, or the improper use of receiving nutriment which induces disease: the mode therefore in which stimulus operates in bringing on disease will best introduce the modus operandi of the Remedy now proposed.

"Man & other warm blooded animals are similarly & wonderfully made. The stomach & other organs associated with it, for the agency of their respective juices, dissolve the food & have its nutritious qualities into the current of the blood which is returning to the heart. The heart receives this mixture and throws it into the vessels of the lungs where by its exposure to the atmospheric air, it acquires new properties & returns to the heart fitted to produce the secretions, to contribute to the growth & nourishment of every part of the body, to which it is immediately car

ied by the arteries. Sensibility or life which seems to be seated in the brain & its appendages, and this whole apparatus in motion & communicates its influences to every part of the system thro the medium of the nerves. Thus the brain, the diaphragm, the lungs & the organs of digestion are mutually dependent on each other. jointly they produce the continuation of life.

"Organized beings have their limited periods of growth maturity, & decay. similar nutritious food pure air, & rest are all that is necessary to perfect the first, prolong the second & to render tranquil the third stage of existence."

"The substances which afford nourishment to animals are sugar starch, flour farina, mucilage vegetable acids, and water, & animal matter. These simple el-

ments are compounded in a variety of ways in the substances used for food, & are sometimes found mixed with other ingredients highly deleterious to animal life. It is enable us to choose and take with safety the benevolent Creator made the senses of seeing ~~hearing~~, smelling, & taste capable of distinguishing between the salubrious & noxious. Until these guards have been once violated, there is but little danger of swallowing poisons inadvertently. If in any instance this does happen, they prove offensive to the nerves of the stomach, intestines, glands, or blood vessels, & an effort is made to expel them by vomiting, sweating or the other emunctories.

"In perfect health all the organs perform their respective functions with ease: the appetite craves nothing but simple food, which is easily digested, & converted into blood;

nerve aids the circulation & corporeal and mental vigour distinguishes the hap[illegible] man."

"That interrupts the delightful circulation, pains, languor, & all the miserable consequences which is most frequently an attempt to improve on the design of nature, to procure pleasure from hot spiced stimulants, & punishment from the hidden fruits.

"Stimulants pepper spices bitters and all those things which are commonly considered strengthening & wholesome, become poisoning to the stomach, in a concentrated form, destroy the organization & life; more diluted they blister; rendered still weaker they may have a smarting one increase the growth of the part to which they are applied. When applied to hairs, the object of which is to do self justice, for the

cial purposes in the animal economy, they increase the quantity & vitiate the quality of such secretions. To illustrate this we need only refer to their operation on the eye. The delicate coats of this organ are so tightly enfolded, the mild & bland fluid which washes & lubricates it so acrid & so corrosive that it even blisters the skin of suffers to run over the cheek for a length of time. In like manner, neither, for example, an article extensively used in modern cookery increases and vitiates the secreted juices of the mouth & stomach. These juices are intended by nature to dissolve & digest the food. In the same proportion that they lose these natural qualities the powers of digestion are lessened. When this happens from the use of stimulants, a sensation resembling hunger is produced. Consequently a larger

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quantity of food is taken than can be perfect-
ly digested. Here we discover the prolific
source of what are usually termed bad
humours, with all their attendant evils.
By this continued abuse of the stomach
the natural appetite is destroyed. That which
was before offensive is now most highly
relished. Simple food that which is best
suited to nourish & invigorate is loathed &
rejected. An artificial appetite for other
poisons is acquired; & he who has thus vi-
tiated his taste will seldom be satisfied
with such drinks as were designed by na-
ture to supply every want of this kind.
Water is tasteless; something more or pun-
gent must take its place; & fortunate
will he be, should he not resort to more
spirits in some form or other, to relieve
that thirst which high seasoned food occasions
"Narcotics or substances which bofuse in-

toxicating qualities (opium, ardent spirits, tobacco &c.) produce effects common with other stimulants on the parts to which they are applied. Their operation on the nervous system is still more injurious. When taken in moderate quantities "they produce a kind of artificial genius, vigour, & vivacity. They lift a man's intellectual faculties as well as his feelings, above their ordinary level. & if by the same means they could be kept for any length of time in that situation, it might constitute something like an apology for having had recourse to them. But the excitement of the system can in no instance be raised above its accustomed & natural pitch without this being succeeded by a correspondent degree of depression." When taken to excess, pleasurable sensation is for a short time carried to its highest elevation.

"Elysium opens round,
A pleasing frenzy buoys the lightened soul;
But soon this Heaven is gone."

Wild delirium, loss of voluntary motion, sleepy, stupor, nausea & vomiting, follow in rapid succession. So this now or less frequently accompanied by shivering, imbecility of body & mind, pain in the head, thirst, anxiety, & other symptoms of indirect debility, succeed. To relieve such distressing complaints, the deluded sufferer, so often resorts again to the deceitful poison. The same scene of joy & maniac distress follows. Still he is not weaned from the bewitching cup, till the powers of life are almost exhausted, when by a wise provision of nature, the hitherto delicious poison becomes so nauseous & offensive, that it can no longer be retained in the stomach: the system is therefore from necessity relieved

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in some measure to recover its impaired energies. "There is however no imprudence in regard to health which does not tell", & altho' after a fit of intoxication, a man may seem to recover all his former vigour, the event will probably prove that he has lost 'a piece of his constitution'. Those frequently suffer most in the end, who do not appear to suffer immediately from every act of indiscretion."

Such is the operation of every substance naturally calculated to support life, if taken in quantities too great for the powers of the stomach to conquer & digest.

Hence may easily be inferred

The modus operandi of Abstinence:

For whenever disease is induced in the manner just detailed, no recovery can possibly take place, while additions are continually ~~[illegible]~~ made to the acting cause of the

Application

complaint. Abstinence, then acts like the cross bar to the street which prevents any interruption to the workmen employed in its repair, or more properly like the Splint on the fractured limb which keeps it at rest while the powers of nature are effecting its cure. It allows the exhausted functions of the digestive apparatus to recover their vigour & energy, by affording that state of quietness so necessary for this purpose in every part of the body.

Application to the cure of Diseases.

In most of the diseases of the digestive system non remedy claims the precedence over every other: More especially in those where the stomach is principally affected. In all diseases, it is thought best generally to attend to the indications of nature & endeavour to promote that object, which she seems to aim at in obtaining relief herself.

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Hence the loathing of food, the nausea, & vomiting in Dyspepsia, Sick headache, point to abstinence as a certain means of immediate relief, & a very probable one of permanent cure. With respect to the latter of the two diseases mentioned, which beyond all doubt originates in the stomach, I have the testimony of a respectable gentleman residing near Philadelphia in favour of our remedy. He informs me that he had been for several years much distressed by a frequent return of this complaint, from which no remedy afforded him any relief. At length, to use his own words he determined on starving it away. He commenced by fasting single days at a time & finding this not sufficient, he extended abstinence from all nourishment for two days in succession; so that at the close of the second day, he was literally

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disturbed his sleep by producing the most tantalizing dreams of luxurious feasting & spreading continually before his fancy the most elegant repasts. Success however complete & permanent, at length crowned his reiterated attempts, & a temporary self denial has terminated in a perfect cure: as no return of the complaint has been experienced for years.

Dr. Wm Price of this city has kindly furnished me with another case which occurred to himself while residing in Pa. The Lady with whom he boarded had become so enslaved to the sick Head ache that twice in the week, she was obliged to do penance to this avenging tyrant. The Doctor recommended anticipating the return of her complaint by voluntary Abstinence. For two months this remedy was perfectly successful, & would doubt

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less have effected a permanent cure, had it been entered upon with resolution & persisted in for any sufficient length of time.

In all those diseases of the Alimentary Canal which arise from irritation or inflammation of its membranes, it would be madness to administer nourishing & stimulating food, until rest has allowed the surcharged bloodvessels of the parts to become relieved of their load. For the increased action of any part is always accompanied by an increased flow of blood. Hence in Dysentery, in Cholera Morbus &c. where the delicate membranes of the intestines are highly irritated & inflamed strict Abstinence should precede & accompany all the measures pursued in their cure.

In Fevers of all kinds, our remedy becomes an indispensable handmaid to the evacuating

ment.

treatment. Fever always originates in the alimentary canal - probably from an irritation of its mucous membrane by miasma or some other deleterious substance. To administer stimulus therefore in such a state of the stomach & intestines, would be to add fuel to the fire already kindled. Hence the maxim so very common, To starve a fever, but feed a cold. In the whole of this class of diseases, as in all the Phlegmasiæ, or in other words, according to the Brown arrangement of our Professor, in all the diseases of the circulatory system, abstinence should be a very principle remedy. While bleeding, purging &c are excellent & often indispensable means of cure, they either exhaust so much of that, which is to become a part of the stamina of life, or so irritate to increase action & wear out, the already weakened powers of the Alimentary Canal,

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that a great Prostration of strength is the immediate consequence & a loss of constitutional vigour sensibly felt thro life. By using our remedy, the wished for effect is produced tho' more slowly, & the powers of the constitution are rather improved, than injured: at any rate no loss is sustained except the retardation of growth for a few days, probably to be followed by a postponement of the hour of death for as many months.

In Chronic catarrh — where the stomach has become inflamed, thro' sympathy with the original seat of the complaint Our remedy promises to be of service. In favour of this suggestion I have the testimony of a gentleman of my acquaintance who had for some time been much oppressed by the cough & Phlegm incident to the complaint. At my recommendation

in bed for a short time entire abstinence from which he experienced no inconvenience of any considerable kind.

According to the general law that the arterial & absorbent systems are in the inverse ratio of each other, such remedy is especially useful in promoting the action of the absorbent vessels. Hence in Dropsy &c where it arises from weakness of these vessels, abstinence comes in as an auxiliary for effecting a cure. Dr. Rush in his Medical inquiries relates a case exactly in point. "To satisfy myself (says he) that an increased discharge of water in a case of which he has been writing) was produced by the fasting only, I recommended it soon after I read the account, to a gentlewoman whom I was then attending in an ascites. I was delighted with the effects of it. Her urine which before

had not exceeded a half a pint a day, amounted to two Quarts on the day she fasted. I repeated the same precaution once a week for several weeks, & each time was informed of an increase of urine, tho' it was considerably less in the last experiments than in the first." Two other cases are related by the Doctor to the same effect. But Dropsy is a disease so apt to proceed from some organic derangement that our remedy here is too uncertain to be relied on; and productive of certain mischief if improperly employed. Be this as it may, I have had certain & repeated experience of its efficacy in very speedily removing little excrescences of the face & other parts of the body. On the same principle a generous diet is recommended to those in low & weak states where stoughs are to be

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thrown off lest the too rapid action of the absorbents should sap up the powers of life. Thus also in wounds, where union by the first intention is desired & the patient is any way plethoric, a low diet is one of the most important means of effecting the object.

In the cutaneous diseases, so great is the sympathy existing between the stomach & skin, that acrid humours in the former created by intemperance, are thrown directly on the latter & vice versa. Hence where it is all important to reduce the eruption speedily as in cases of confluent small-pox &c. no remedy will be more likely to succeed than an entire abstinence from nourishment.

In the Sensitive system, our remedy comes in for a large share of attention. The brain clogged & infected by a Plethora

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of its bloodvessels is immediately relieved from a state bordering on Coma & entire stupidity by severe fasting; indeed nothing is more common than heaviness & sleepiness probabilitly coexistent with hunger. Every student knows the effect produced on his memory & judgment by a hearty dinner: and every drunkard is a daily witness of the debilitating & stupefying effect of his daily & nightly intoxication. The nerves also encumbered by excess of fat & blood, are unable so perfectly to perform their functions; hence a want of sensibility, or a morbid irritability comes on, to remove which nothing can equal our remedy for certainty of success. In frequent experiments which I have made on this subject I have always found the powers of the mind invigorated nervous irritability removed,

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and tone & energy restored to the whole system by an occasional entire Abstinence. Dr. Rush in recommending abstinence as a proper caution during the time of the Yellow fever of 1793, remarks that thro' long fasting, the nerves of his fingers had acquired so acute sensibility, that he was enabled to distinguish with double facility the pulse of his patients. Dr. Trotter in his excellent work on the nervous temperament, has adduced many instances of his succesful ~~treatment~~ of Nervous diseases on this principle; & he doubts not that most if not all the diseases of this class arise from excessive stimulus; and hence are to be treated ~~by~~ by Abstinence.

Among the disorders of the muscular system, Gout most undoubtedly demands the prompt & long continued application

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of our remedy. Brought on generally by luxurious living, it is attended with all those symptoms of a deranged state of the stomach & bowels which so clearly indicate & require a change of living. Where patients can be brought to submit to the routine of exercise & low diet for the remainder of life; a perfect cure is generally produced. To hasten & confirm this desirable object a frequent repetition of our remedy promises to be of a most salutary tendency.

A few remarks on its application to diseases of the generative system shall close the present head. It is a fact well known that in Asia, where one man cohabits with many wives, they are accustomed to administer to him, the most acrid & stimulating articles of

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diet, to produce a more frequent return of their enjoyment. &, it is said, with success. Hence in those dreadfully distressing diseases, Satyriasis & Nymphomania, I should conjecture, that a long & severe fast in conjunction with other remedies would most likely seldom fail of success. Abstinence would not only tend to lessen the secretion of the immediately irritating cause of the disease but it would also have the effect of giving tone to the system & consequently of counteracting that extreme irritability on which the diseases depend.

Experiment.

It remains for me now to state the immediate effect of the Remedy proposed on the pulse & system generally. My last experiment has produced the following result. Viz. Thursday Oct. 28 Ate a hearty

dinner
Brecock

dinner & felt about as well as usual at 5 o'clock P.M. pulse 96 weak & small in vol-
-ume 1/4 of usual supper & walked 2 or 3 miles
at 10 pulse 75 of natural strength & volume.
Slept as usual. Friday - half past 7 drank a
cup of warm sweetened water - at half past
9 pulse 67 at 11 - 64 at 1 - 75 at 3 - 74 1/2
at 5 - 74 at 6 drank as in the morning at half
past 10 pulse 60 very weak & fluttering - was
free from pain or dulness - but a sensation
of stretching something, extended thro' my
head & towards the stomach - which to-
ward evening felt somewhat uneasy.
In the afternoon & evening of Friday &
morning of Saturday - there was a constant
flow of Saliva. My strength was much
exhausted - tho' I took no exercise - & my
sleep much disturbed: dreamed as usual
of eating very heartily. Break-fast on Satur-
-day immediately restored my strength & spirits.

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A few words on the efficacy of our Remedy as a Prophylactic, & I have done.

The necessarily simple diet of the Antediluvian Patriarchs, has been assigned as one reason out of many for the extraordinary age to which they lived. The Ancient Jews surely would not so often have practiced it as a religious rite, & the Christians so generally have followed their example — had not something salutary been originally intended in its observance. Instances, of modern date, which none pretend to dispute, are recorded where abstemious diet has snatched the greatest debauchees from the very jaws of death & prolonged their lives to an extreme old age. Horses also it is said, can travel much better, without eating, immediately before setting out.

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My first Preceptor Dr. S. Tucker of Burlington (now a resident of this city) was in the habitual practice of abstaining from food, to prevent an expected attack of sickness; a practice which Dr. Rush used to recommend & to follow himself: & from wh: he doubted not that many years were added to his life.

From the various considerations now detailed, I conclude that a weekly or monthly repetition of the practice just alluded to, would enable us as it were to keep within soundings, as to the healthy state of our stomach, & would lay the foundation for that tone of nerve & solidity of muscular fibre, which would enable us with the blessing of Heaven, effectually to keep off the attacks of disease, & qualify us to perform aright our various duties in life.